

## INKEDFLUENCED IDENTITY: REDEFINING WORKPLACE PRESENCE AND SOCIETAL NORMS

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**ABSTRACT.** The act of free expression has been a longstanding tradition observed by people worldwide, dating back approximately 12,000 years BC. While in the past, activities such as visual arts, fashion, or education were recognized as means of entertainment and self-expression in society, today the art of tattooing has emerged as a valid and embraced form of self-expression. Tattooing is no longer viewed by the general population, especially young adults, as a means to rebel against social norms or as a practice that diminishes human worth. Instead, it has evolved into a dualistic representation of self and a symbol of personal growth and development. However, within the workplace, this form of self-expression is not prioritized. In the past two decades, numerous companies and conglomerates have started implementing policies pertaining to the appearance of their employees. Nevertheless, there are still many companies that have not taken this progressive step. Professional and personal life after the Pandemic will not be what it once was, and the corporate environment and its characteristics are constrained by these changes in the attitude of its human component and is forced to take measures in this regard. The purpose of this work was to analyze and observe the perception of society and different organizational cultures regarding tattoos as a form of self-expression of employees and job applicants, both locally and

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internationally. Following this research, it is wanted to be confirmed or infirmed the existence of the measure in which this practice of expression leads to discrimination in employment and acceptance in society or if this taboo of tattooing in the workplace is still a practice or not. These hypotheses are intended to be tested by implementing exploratory research and collecting secondary data by consulting various specialized articles and studies, but also by collecting primary data represented by individual interviews and by conducted an eye-tracking experiment, with tattoo artists, consumers of this practice.

**Keywords:** tattoo, culture, workplace, perceptions, stigma, young workforce generation

**JEL classification:** D63, J71

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## INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that tattoos have long been linked to the counterculture movement in the modern workplace, where workers are frequently evaluated. More than that, tattooing has been popular among artists for many years, from hip-hop musicians through punk rockers of the 1970s. Since the advent of social media, they have been used for millennia as a means of self-expression and have grown in popularity. Even if they are not prohibited, many individuals nevertheless have negative opinions about tattoos. Although the causes of this stigma differ from person to person, there are some widespread misconceptions about them. Tattoos have always held a significant place in many cultures, even though they are frequently associated with “the wrong crowd” and disobedience. Tattoos can have deeper, more meaningful significance than only the surface level factors. They can, for instance, serve as a reminder of important life events, such as formative early childhood experiences, and provide emotional support for the emotional processing of such events (Ernst *et al.*, 2022).

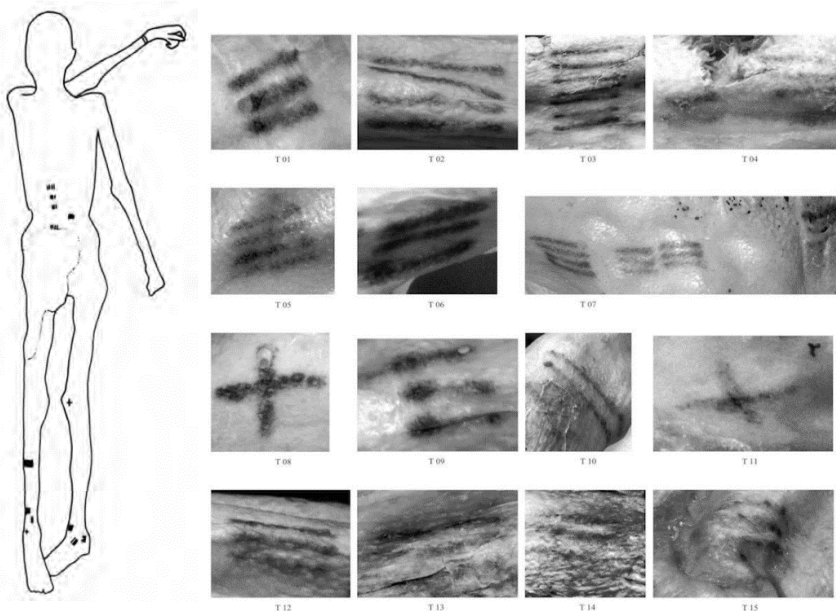
Tattoos are a common form of self-expression and personal identity in contemporary culture. However, many people find them uplifting or empowering because they reflect their views and values in a way that matches their own personality. They are often perceived by many as being rebellious and nonconformist. Because they effectively represent their moral ideals and personal tastes, many people believe tattoos to be powerful. People from diverse backgrounds and professions proudly display the tattoos that represent their experiences, hobbies, and objectives in life. The idea of the present paper appeared during the conception and realization of the dissertation thesis.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tattooing is a permanent body modification made by inserting ink into the second layer of skin and it is executed with the help of a tattoo machine or needles. Tattoos can be decorative or symbolic and can express feelings towards various things or people. They are used for artistic, cosmetic, sentimental, memorial, religious and spiritual reasons, as well as to symbolize belonging or identification with certain groups (Václavíková, 2022).

Throughout history, perceptions of tattoos have varied across cultures and time periods (Gilbert, 2000). Tattooing, or the permanent inking of motifs and patterns on the skin, is a universal and indisputably ancient activity. As Deter-Wolf *et al.* (2016) said, tattooing was a common activity in antiquity, according to historical and archeological data, and Indigenous people from all continents except Antarctica incorporated tattooing into their cultural traditions. Indigenous tattoo practices have served as a way to mark the passage into adulthood, represent social rank, record military prowess, show lineage and group membership, and even channel and control paranormal powers, depending on the culture and time period. Looking further into the subject from the point of view of terminology, the word “tattoo” comes from the Polynesian culture and means “inscription” or “ornament”. At the same time, it is mentioned by historians how James Cook, the 18th century explorer, brought this term into Western culture after his travels in the Polynesian islands, where he was impressed by the indigenous tattoos. Polynesians used onomatopoeia such as “ta-ta-ta” to describe the process of applying tattoos using sharp wands. The oldest evidence of a tattooed man comes from “Otzi”, a mummy discovered in 1991

in the Italian Alps. Otzi's tattoos were considered to be therapeutic and not decorative, being associated with medical practices such as acupuncture (Stanculescu, 2023). Otzi had 61 tattoos on his body, which could be seen in *Figure 1*. These tattoos were located on his left wrist, lower thighs, lower back, and torso. These 19 collections of lines have a thickness of from one to three mm and a length of between 7 and 40 mm. His legs, which collectively sport twelve groups of lines, have the most markings (Deter-Wolf *et al.*, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Ötzi, the Iceman's tattoos

**Source:** Laura Geggel (2015). Published at

<https://www.livescience.com/49611-otzi-iceman-mummy-tattoos.html>



Considering the cultural side of the origins of tattoos, it is mentioned by researchers that in Japanese culture, tattoos have been widespread since the 3rd century, originally being symbols of strength and courage in men. During the Edo period (1603-1868), tattoos became a distinctive art form called irezumi and were worn by samurai and other upper classes (Hawken, 2022). At the same time, in the West, the popularity of tattoos increased in the 18th century, when sailors tattooed their bodies as a reminder of their travels and adventures. In the 19th century, tattoos became

more common among the working class in Europe and North America. Evidence for the existence of tattoos is found in iconographic representations and identifiable tattoo implements, and preserved tattooed human remains are the most conclusive evidence (Hawken, 2022). Further, supplementing the evidence behind the popularization of tattoos, it is mentioned in several specialist writings that the earliest written evidence of the practice of tattooing is found in ancient Chinese texts such as early prose, historical works, dynastic chronicles, and criminal codes.

Some of these texts date back to 1000 BC. In a text from the 3rd or 4th century BC, Zhuangzi mentions the people of Yue who cut their hair and tattooed their bodies by cutting and pigmenting their skin. The Yue, a people of southern China and northern Vietnam, marked their bodies to protect themselves from monsters and mythical creatures. According to researchers, the Chinese commonly used tattoos to mark criminals on the face, thereby warning society of their wrongdoings. In Europe, the first Greek sources describing tattoos date from the 5th century BC.

Soldiers of the Roman Empire were tattooed with the mark SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus, meaning “Senate and People of Rome”) and dots for identification. Originally, tattoos could be considered a sign of prestige in Greek culture but were later associated with slavery and degradation in both Roman and Greek culture. The Greeks are believed to have adopted the practice of punitive tattoos from the Persians in the 6th century BC, when criminals, slaves and enemies were marked. A well-known example is that of the Athenians tattooing owls on defeated Samians and then receiving warship tattoos from the defeated Greeks. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus indicated that many ancient cultures that the Greeks and Romans encountered considered tattoos as symbols of pride. Ancient Egypt is another culture that probably influenced the practice of tattoos in Greece, where they were used mainly for decorative purposes (Václavíková, 2022). Table 1, which offers a description of these typologies as well as an illustration of their symbolism and the reasons why they have been and are still acknowledged, provides further information on the different tattoo typologies in terms of their cultural origins.

**Table 1.** Typologies and symbolism in tattoos derived from world cultures

TYPOLOGY	DESCRIPTIONS	EXAMPLES AND SYMBOLISM
<p data-bbox="230 387 431 409"><b>MARINE TATTOOS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ They are a traditional style of tattoos done mainly by sailors and soldiers;</li> <li>▪ They became a popular art form and were used to bring luck and protection on sea voyages;</li> <li>▪ Today, they are considered a form of folk art and personal expression;</li> <li>▪ It is characterized by simple and strong designs, inspired by marine life and the ocean.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some common motifs in sailor tattoos include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchors</li> <li>• Carabiner wheels</li> <li>• Hearts</li> <li>• The stars</li> <li>• Roosters</li> <li>• Swallows (swallows)</li> <li>• Pin-up girls</li> <li>• Sirens</li> <li>• Skulls</li> </ul> </li> <li>- These motifs are associated with symbols of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection</li> <li>• Good luck</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• Devotion to life at sea.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="206 877 455 899"><b>POLYNESIAN TATTOOS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ They originate from the islands of the South Pacific and are known for their complex patterns and strong symbolism.</li> <li>▪ They are made by repeatedly piercing the skin with a tool called tatau and use straight and curved lines to create detailed patterns.</li> <li>▪ These tattoos can cover the entire surface of the body.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They have a strong symbolism and each pattern has a unique meaning; Common motifs in Polynesian tattoos include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patterns of spirals</li> <li>• Triangles</li> <li>• Diamonds</li> <li>• Circles</li> <li>• Lines</li> </ul> </li> <li>- These designs may represent aspects of nature such as ocean waves, rain or fire, or they may represent specific animals or plants such as snakes or turtledoves;</li> <li>- Polynesian tattoos are often used to represent local history and culture;</li> <li>- Certain designs may represent different tribes or families, while others may indicate a person's social status or role in the community;</li> </ul>

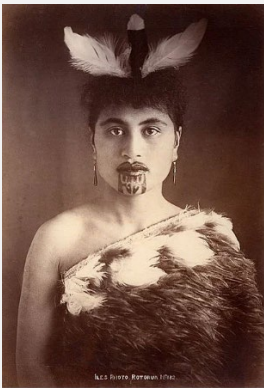
**TYOLOGY**

**DESCRIPTIONS**

**EXAMPLES AND SYMBOLISM**

- Polynesian tattoos can also be used to indicate performance in various activities such as sailing or hunting.

**MAORI TATTOOS**



- They come from the Maori culture of New Zealand and are known for their complex patterns and strong meaning;
- They are made by repeatedly pricking the skin with a special tool called uhi or mārō, using black ink;
- Designs are symmetrical and use straight and curved lines to create complex and detailed patterns;
- They are commonly done on the face, arms, legs and back.

- Maori tattoos have strong symbolism and each design has a unique meaning.  
 - These represent different values and traditions of Maori culture, including history, spirituality and cultural identity.  
 Examples of pattern meanings:


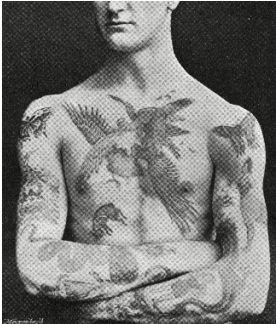
- Snake or reptile head designs can represent protection from evil.
- Horn patterns can represent power and authority.
- Other designs may represent specific animals, such as birds or snakes, which have special meanings in Maori culture.

**CHINESE TATTOOS**

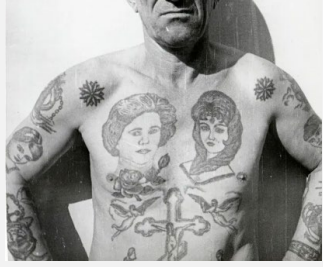



- They are known for using Chinese characters and designs inspired by Chinese culture and history.
- These are usually done in black ink and have complex and detailed designs.
- They are often made on the arms, back, chest or legs

- Chinese tattoos are an important art form in Chinese culture.  
 - These are associated with the values and traditions of Chinese culture.  
 - Chinese characters in tattoos can represent moral values such as courage, honesty or loyalty.  
 - Patterns inspired by Chinese art and history can represent themes such as love, victory or luck.

<p><b>TYOLOGY</b></p>	<p><b>DESCRIPTIONS</b></p>	<p><b>EXAMPLES AND SYMBOLISM</b></p>
<p><b>JAPANESE TATTOOS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also known as irezumi, they are made using traditional tattooing techniques, which involve piercing the skin with a special tool called tebori.</li> <li>• These tattoos are known for their use of vibrant colors and intricate and detailed designs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are closely related to Japanese culture and history, being associated with traditions such as samurai, geisha and Japanese mythology. For example, dragon designs can represent power and strength, while cherry blossom designs can represent beauty and the passage of time.</li> <li>- They are related to Japanese values and traditions such as discipline, courage and loyalty.</li> <li>- These can be done especially in cultural ceremonies or as a form of respect for Japanese culture and traditions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>EUROPEAN TATTOOS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the Middle Ages, they went through a period of illegality with the growing influence of the Church, because they were associated with earlier pagan beliefs.</li> <li>• Northern European tribes such as the Celts and Vikings tattooed themselves with symbols inspired by nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The specific Irish-Gaelic symbolism is extremely rich:</li> <li>• The salmon is considered a symbol of wisdom, introspection and deep knowledge, and</li> <li>• The bird represents freedom.</li> <li>• The butterfly, in turn, is a metaphor for transformation and rebirth.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CRIMINALS TATTOOS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are a distinct aspect of tattoos, associated with criminal groups and crime.</li> <li>• They have a specific meaning in the criminal world and serve as indicators of affiliation, status or warning between criminals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The symbolism and meaning of criminal tattoos may vary by region, criminal group or specific culture.</li> <li>- Sometimes these tattoos can indicate the degree of involvement in criminal activities, status or rank within an organization, or even crimes committed by the individual.</li> </ul>

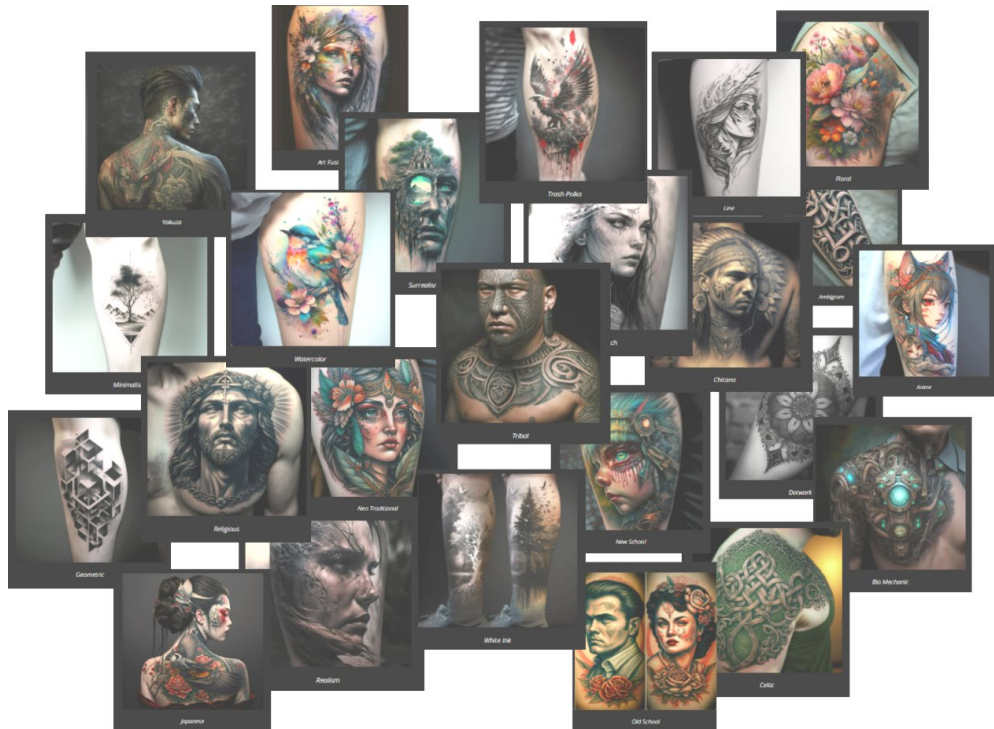


TYPOLOGY	DESCRIPTIONS	EXAMPLES AND SYMBOLISM
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can convey a sense of power, loyalty, devotion or, in some cases, even serve as a warning or intimidation to other criminals or rivals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODERN TATTOOS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stands out for its use of advanced techniques, vibrant colors and innovative designs.</li> <li>• They offer a wide range of styles and motifs, reflecting people's individual tastes and preferences.</li> <li>• These can include styles such as realism, minimalism, abstract, tribal, geometric, watercolor, neo-traditional, and more.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The symbolism and meaning of modern tattoos can vary depending on the design and intentions of the wearer.</li> <li>- These tattoos can have personal and deep meanings for the individual, representing his values, interests, experiences or feelings. For example, a flower tattoo can symbolize beauty, fragility, or a moment of personal blossoming, while a compass tattoo can represent a desire to find direction or stability in life.</li> </ul>

**Source:** The authors' work adapted from the article written by Catalin Stanculescu (2023) and according to the information provided by the website [tattooing101.com](http://tattooing101.com)

As a summary of the information presented in the above table, tattoos might be described as cryptic and complex or simple and obvious. Tattooing has been practiced throughout history by many distinct cultures, each of which has its own set of tools, inks, and methods (Mallick & Kipgen 2023). Also, based on the historical information about the techniques, material and tools used in the art of tattooing and the evolution of those, tattoos can be categorized based on tattooing styles, designs, and methods. According to [tattooing101.com](http://tattooing101.com) and [tattooinsight.com](http://tattooinsight.com), some of the most popular tattoo styles are traditional, neo-traditional, realism, watercolor,

Japanese, tribal, and blackwork (See Figure 2). The creative style of a tattoo can be used to categorize and characterize it. Tattoos with a traditional design are often influenced by certain cultures, such as sailor or tribal art. To create a lifelike image, realistic tattoos attempt to accurately reproduce things, people, or landscapes. Old School tattoos have a throwback look that is distinguished by bold colors, strong black lines, and thick lines.



**Figure 2.** Extensive illustration of the diversity of tattoo styles

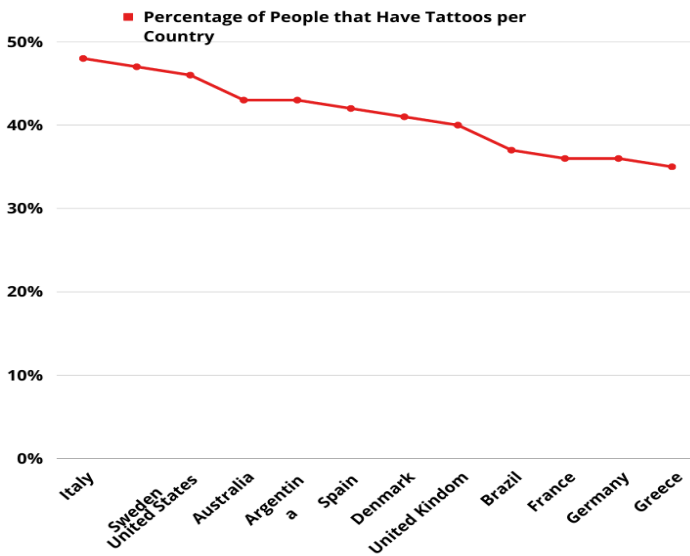
**Source:** The authors' work based on the information provided by the author Andrei Kovalev (2022) on the website

<https://www.midlibrary.io>, images that were made using AI technology

Abstract or fantastical motifs, bright colors, and thin lines are all characteristics of New School tattoos. Tattoos that use water effects and diluted colors imitate the watercolor style. Lines, triangles, circles, and other geometric shapes constitute the foundation of geometric tattoos. Words, quotations, or sentences are inscribed on the skin as script tattoos in a

variety of fonts and writing styles. Neo-traditional tattoos can be thought of as a modern take on American Traditional. Neo Traditional uses varied line weights, soft gradients, additional colors, and complex details while still retaining a two-dimensional appearance and technical accuracy.

In industrialized nations during the 1970s, tattoos have grown in popularity and come to be identified with specific occupations and cultural movements. According to a survey of people between the ages of 18 and 50, it is currently estimated that 10% to 24% of the general population in Europe, Australia, and the United States have tattoos. These findings were provided in their work by the authors Oanta *et al.* (2014). Recent research in Germany of 3,400 tattooed individuals painted a typical picture of the “tattooed person”: men and women in their 30s with tattoos covering an area of roughly 300 cm<sup>2</sup> (or more in 61% of respondents), and 65% of them had several tattoos (Oanta *et al.*, 2014).

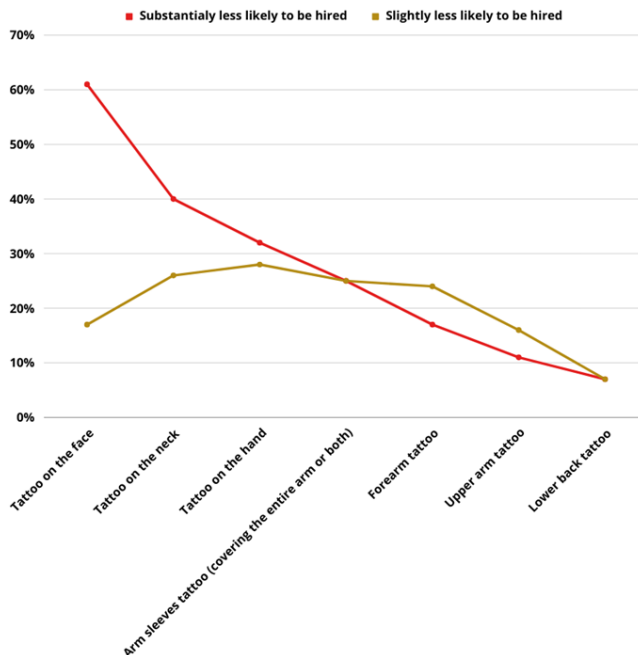


**Figure 3.** The percentage of the population with tattoos per country.  
**Source:** Authors’ work based on article written by Jason Wise (2023)

Incorporating data from specialized websites like Statista, Salary.com, and other websites like YouGov, according to author Jason Wise (2023), highlights the stigmatization phenomena. He also points out that stigma in

the job is one of the reasons why many people choose not to have tattoos or attempt to cover them up. In a UK survey, it was discovered that about 25% of participants were in favor of tattoo-related photos. When considering formal, highly trained occupations like those of doctors and lawyers, however, the attitude drastically altered and fell to fewer than 10%.

Finding a job is extremely difficult for people who have more obvious tattoos, particularly on the face and neck. In contrast, tattoos that are covered by clothing, like those on the back or upper arm, draw less criticism (Wise, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a clear prejudice towards someone with a tattoo, regardless of where it is. They are at a disadvantage in this regard compared to their counterparts who do not have tattoos (Wise, 2023). Figure 3 below shows that the country with the highest percentage of tattooed people is Italy, at 48%, followed by Sweden, at 47%. Other European nations with high rates of tattooing include Spain, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and France, with percentages ranging from 35% to 48% (Wise, 2023).



**Figure 4.** The percentage of the population that are likely to be hired based on the placement of their tattoo

**Source:** Authors' work based on article written by Jason Wise (2023)

A study by Oxygen Network and Lightspeed discovered that 59% of women globally have at least one tattoo. Only 13% of women in the country of the tattoo report having one, compared to 15% of all men of all ages. Similar statistics may be found in Russia, where 39% of men and only 27% of women respectively have at least one tattoo. With almost 40% of its members sporting at least one tattoo, the 18-to-34 age group has the highest prevalence of ink. With a rate of 36%, people in the 35 to 54 age range come in second. On the other hand, only 16% of adults 55 and older have tattoos (Wise, 2023). Even though there has been progress in exposing the stigmatization of those with tattoos, particularly in highly developed economies, discrimination still happens frequently. According to data gathered by the same author through research on various platforms and statistical reports, he discusses in his article that despite the progress made in lowering stigmatization of the tattooed population, especially in highly developed economies, there are still high rates of discrimination in the modern world. Figure 4 shows the perspective of people with tattoos and the proportion of their employment opportunities based on where their tattoos may be seen.

The graph above and data from Jason Wise (2023) indicate that people with facial tattoos appear to be 61% less likely to be considerably employed and 17% less likely to be lightly employed. A hand tattoo increases the likelihood of being hired easily by 28% while a neck tattoo decreases the likelihood of being considerably employed by 40% and lightly employed by 26%. Regarding people with tattoos on the whole arm or both arms (tattoo sleeves), those with a tattoo on the forearm and those with a tattoo on the upper arm have a 25%, 17% and 11% lower probability respectively to be employed substantially and with 25%, 24%, and 16% less to be employed lightly. Moreover, these same statistics state that people with lower back tattoos are 7% less likely to be substantially employed and 7% less likely to be lightly employed (Wise, 2023).

Numerous studies (Desrumaux *et al.*, 2009; Featherstone, 2010; Hosoda *et al.*, 2003; Braun *et al.*, 2015; Madera, 2016) have examined the impact of physical attractiveness on hiring decisions. Woodford *et al.* (2022) discuss in their study how data suggests that job applicants who have desirable physical attributes, such as physical attractiveness, are often viewed in a more favorable light during the selection process. The “pretty is good” heuristic, which states that physical attractiveness provides

a halo effect that causes favorable judgments of attractive individuals, can be used to explain this preference for appearance (Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Murphy *et al.*, 2015). In general, applicants with unfavorable physical traits - such as obesity, facial deformity, a physical disability, or purposeful body modification - are evaluated less favorably and may be more likely to experience direct discrimination throughout the application process. Koch *et al.* (2015) and Carter (2016) talk about selection. When physical attractiveness is prioritized over cerebral aptitude and knowledge of one's surroundings, this sort of prejudice, known as "lookism," is more prevalent in employment involving direct consumer contact. Despite the fact that visible tattoos are more prevalent and accepted in modern society (Kluger, 2015), most employers still view them as a disqualifying physical trait. Tattoos are viewed by society as a source of stigma because of their historical links with sailors, gang members, prisoners, motorcyclists, and people participating in unlawful and socially deviant behavior (Zestcott *et al.*, 2018). In turn, "tattooed" people are stigmatized as a marginalized group in society and are connected to unfavorable social traits such sexual promiscuity, drug use, anger, violence, delinquent behavior, low intelligence, and dishonesty. The stigma hypothesis states that stigma can automatically elicit unfavorable assumptions and accompanying reactions, which can result in the formation of both explicit and implicit negative attitudes (Dale *et al.*, 2009; Bekhor *et al.*, 1995; Baumann *et al.*, 2016; Dean, 2010, 2011; Henle *et al.*, 2018; Jibuti, 2018; Miller *et al.*, 2016; Swanger, 2006; Timming, 2015; Zestcott *et al.*, 2018)

According to studies, tattoos are often seen as an unfavorable trait in the workplace and hiring managers have a stronger negative attitude toward job applicants with visible tattoos (Woodford *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, it was shown that these candidates encountered more direct and indirect prejudice during the screening process. The extent to which visible tattoos affect work prospects, according to study, may vary depending on the situation. Timming (2015) found that managers' attitudes toward applicants with visible tattoos varied by industry and degree of customer interaction, with tattoos being less tolerated in the service industry and in jobs that directly deal with customers. Less than a third of managers in the hotel, beauty, retail, and office industries were willing to hire a person with a visible tattoo, according to Bekhor *et al.*'s (1995) research. Customers often have negative feelings toward service industry personnel

who have tattoos, unless they work in more traditionally masculine roles, like mechanics, according to more recent studies, such as that conducted by Baumann *et al.* (2016). In another study on consumer preferences, Dean (2010) found that while identical tattoos on manual workers were acceptable, those on clerical workers were regarded inappropriate.

Studies by Dean (2010) and Baumann *et al.* (2016) found that the nature of the role or industry had an impact on customers' perceptions of visible tattoos. This research showed that, compared to manual or blue-collar employment, traditional office tasks are less favorable toward visible tattoos. Contrarily, the division of employment into white-collar and blue-collar classifications is a frequent method for separating labor tasks according to their context, content, and associated physical and psychological demands (Woodford *et al.*, 2022). Blue-collar professions typically involve hard physical labor and a focus on physical rather than intellectual demands. They are distinguished by low levels of autonomy, discretion, task variety, and decision-making, according to researchers. Since they usually require less formal education and training, they are more common. White-collar jobs, such those performed by managers, supervisors, and professionals, call for more complex cognitive activities and are associated with higher levels of independence, discretion, and decision-making.

Additionally, these occupations frequently ask for a higher level of education, experience, and training (Herr *et al.*, 2015; Ravensteijn *et al.*, 2017; Schreurs *et al.*, 2011). According to the stereotype fit theory (Dipboye, 1985), decision-makers may view members of various social groups as being suited for certain jobs or organizations based on common misconceptions about that group (for a more in-depth explanation, see Lee *et al.*, 2015). With the help of this hypothesis, it is possible to understand why tattoo acceptance varies between white-collar and blue-collar occupations. As was previously stated (Kosut, 2006), people with tattoos are stigmatized as being less talented, intelligent, determined, and honest than those without tattoos. According to the theory of stereotype matching, a hiring manager might use these stereotypes as a source of knowledge to determine that a job applicant with tattoos is unfit for a white-collar function given the intellectually demanding nature of the responsibilities involved with that employment. Similarly, a hiring manager may come to the opposite conclusion and believe that a candidate with tattoos is a good fit for a profession that demands less mental input or decision-making and requires

greater physical toughness and endurance, attributes typically associated with blue collar employment. According to Timming (2015), tattooed people's ability to find employment depends heavily on their proximity to clients. An employer can conclude that a job applicant with tattoos is not a good fit for a white-collar position requiring customer connection because of stereotypes that equate tattoos to fear, wrath, and hostility since many white-collar jobs require involvement with consumers. The bulk of blue-collar positions, in contrast, do not necessitate close client contact, which reduces the weight given to tattoos in the hiring decision (Woodford *et al.*, 2022).

Stereotypes regarding tattooed persons may vary depending on the tattoos' individual characteristics and the context in which the tattooed person is encountered. When it comes to employment, clients' perceptions of workers with tattoos may be influenced by these stereotypes (Frankel *et al.*, 2023). The activation and application of preconceptions or the intentionally stereotyped processing of tattoos, however, are necessary for this grading system. The style, color, and size of a tattoo can have a positive or negative impact on how people feel about them. The working environment, which includes professional responsibilities, customer interaction, and the degree of luxury in the office, has an impact on how well-rated tattooed employees are. However, there are other cases where employees with tattoos receive positive feedback, especially in the service industry where an artistic appearance is valued. In the context of the workplace, the impact of tattoos on stereotypes and intentions to do business with tattooed employees is investigated (Frankel *et al.*, 2023).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study is based on the research carried out during the master's program for the completion of the dissertation thesis. The study incorporated both primary and secondary research. Exploratory research was used in the first part of the study to collect secondary data, which required reading through the text of several specialized papers and publications. The secondary data for this study was also acquired over a three-month period using a range of academic and scientific study



and research platforms, such as Research Gate, Science Direct, Springer, and Google Scholar to download specialist literature. For the purposes of this chapter, the in-depth semi-structured interview served as the primary exploratory research method, while neuromarketing research served as a cutting-edge, contemporary research method. A sample of 29 interviewees will be used for the qualitative data collecting approach, which is the interview. The composition of this sample consists of 12 students, 2 civil servants, 2 plastic artists, 2 pensioners, a photographer, an IT worker, a hotel receptionist, a technical actuary, a flight attendant, 3 talent acquisition, a piercer and 2 artists tattoo artists. The motivation behind the choice of diversifying the interview participants from the point of view of occupations was mainly the desire to find out the main perceptions towards tattoos, both from the point of view of increasing the popularity of this trend within the Romanian population, but also from the point of view the presence of tattooed individuals on the labor market and the attitude towards them, especially in jobs that have a greater interaction with the final consumer, such as those of civil servants, receptionists or flight attendants.

Through the tattoo artists and the interviewees who admitted getting tattoos, it was possible to learn more about the tattoo market in Romania and the level of appeal to this phenomenon of body modification. It was also able to identify several similar characteristics relating to the mindset of tattoo consumers and to identify some universal traits relating to tattoo preferences and the driving forces behind tattoo decisions. In addition, the participants in the in-depth interview ranged in age from 19 to 25 years old to 40 to 75 years old. In the interview, women outnumbered men by a ratio of 21 to 8, and Cluj County, Constanta County, Bistrița, Suceava, and Tulcea were the most frequent places of origin. Urban and rural settings were also employed to depict the environment of origin. Finding and interviewing the interview applicants also took roughly two months. The interviews were conducted over the phone, online via the Microsoft Teams platform, and in-person in Cluj-Napoca. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The participants were informed at the outset of the interview that their replies would be kept confidential and used only as indicated. They were also informed that the discussion would be recorded.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the interviews, it appears that both within and outside of Romania, tattoos on the job aspect are not given much weight in general. The young adults who participated in the interviews displayed a deep love for tattoos and a desire to express themselves freely through them. Most of them admitted to having tattoos and said their primary motivations for getting them were to personalize their bodies with images that held special meaning for them. Other motivations for getting tattoos were impulsivity and a desire to fit in. Additionally, the interviewees that work in human resource field mentioned that there are still clients or older employees in Romania who view tattoos negatively and that there is still a generational divide in this regard.

Those workers as talent acquisition noted that there is not a well-known negative perception about those who have tattoos and that they have not really encountered this phenomenon of discrimination or misunderstanding, but they wanted to mention that older people still have a negative perception about tattoos and that employees are encouraged to cover them up. On the other hand, there were participants who are already employed and who encountered these tattoo problems at their workplace, but they were only encountered in the experience of people who worked in the aviation field as flight attendants or as waiters in a restaurant. They pointed out that there are still people who persist in the idea that tattoos are associated with bad people and violent behavior, especially on the part of older people, and that is why employers have clothing policies or covering tattoos at their workplace especially when it comes to interacting with customers. In another vein, there were participants who agreed that there are also employers who do not have a problem with their appearance at all, and even said that their tattoos are often a way to get closer to other colleagues and to start conversations at work.

Regarding the opinion of the participants at the idea of whether or not tattoos affect a person's career on a long run, their answers were divided, some of them considering that tattoos do not affect a person's career and that today's generation of employers is not entirely populated by people who have a problem with them, and the other half agreed with the idea that they are an obstacle in an individual's career. Following the

identification of a general reason that causes this reticence towards people with tattoos, the conclusion was reached that it is not the tattoos themselves that represent this reason, but rather the model chosen to make the tattoos and the placement, as for example on the face. One of the respondents even gave examples such as the presence of an obscene message or grotesque designs in visible places. Moreover, another participant in the interview mentioned that in her career she encountered situations of reticence based on a person's tattoos both at her address and from the point of view of close people, mentioning that one of her acquaintances was treated failed the driving test because he had visible tattoos, and personally this person mentioned how during the time she worked with the Work and Travel program in the USA, at a restaurant she was told to cover her tattoos and this situation and behavior created a feeling of inferiority and misconception for the person in question.

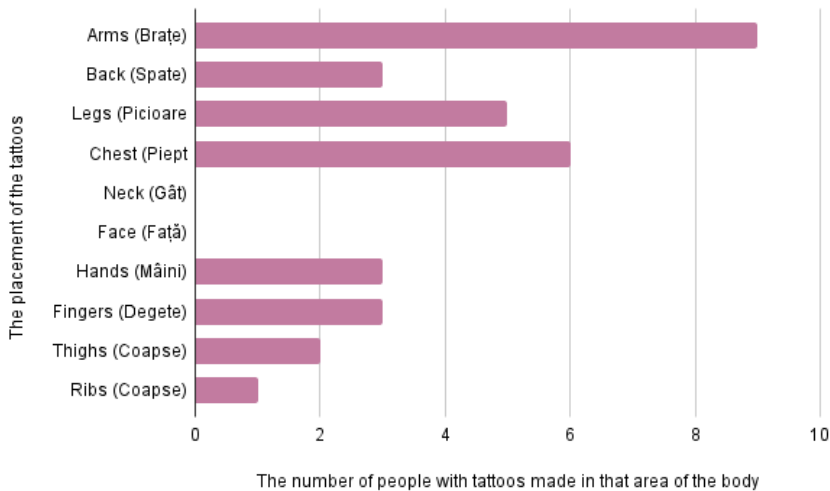
When the people interviewed were asked to give their opinion on tattooed people and how they would describe such people in general, the vast majority said that they have a certain respect for these people because they see them as brave, authentic, and very cool, expressing in at the same time and a certain curiosity towards them. Other people have also mentioned that in their opinion they are "just people" and that their tattoos do not in any way change their judgment towards them or their correlation with a certain social group. Moreover, the interviewed people unanimously agreed that tattoos are form of personal and artistic expression, through which each person can convey feelings, experiences, and identity. One person also mentions that: *„Tattoos allow us to express our creativity and mark significant aspects of our lives and are ways in which we can use our body as a canvas to create art and express our individuality”*. When the respondents were asked what they consider to be the role of tattoos in society, the majority said that in general tattoos are perceived as forms of personal expression and art. Another idea shared by most participants was that there are still people who associate them with criminality or consider them negative, such as the older generation such as grandparents. One of the interviewees added on this matter that: *“Personally, I went through the situation of having a dispute about tattoos with older people. In my opinion, the fight between generations regarding tattoos is born because of the instinct of the elderly to oppose the change of social dogmas to which they were exposed, in turn, in their youth. Thus, they oppose tattoos*

*today as they were considered an indicator of infamous people.*" In recent years, however, there has been a trend toward greater acceptance and recognition of the artistic value of tattoos, was another addition. The role of tattoos is subjective and depends on everyone, being a way of expression, memory, beauty, or identity, answered the respondents.

During the interviews started, I had the opportunity to interview a number of 18 people with tattoos from those interviewed. From the point of view of people with tattoos, I was able to answer questions regarding the identification of consumer behavior for this permanent body decoration service. The vast majority said that they have tattoos starting from one and the most, namely 14 small ones done over the course of 6 years, were the answers given by the interviewees. They also said that they got their first tattoo at the age of 18 and 16. When the people with tattoos were asked about the area where their tattoos are found, according to the graph below Figure 5, out of the 18 people, 9 said that they have tattoos on their hands, 3 on their backs, 5 on their legs, 6 on their chest, 3 on the hands, 3 on the fingers, 2 on the thighs and 1 person on the ribs. When these people were asked to justify the choice made to get inked, most said that they chose the respective area of the body for tattoos depending on the size and complexity of the desired tattoo. One person also said that he chose to get tattoos on his hands because he always wants to see them up closed, not necessarily for the aesthetics but because they remind her of the periods and personal reasons why she decided to get them done in the first place. Other people, such as those who said they got tattoos on their fingers, also mentioned the desire for aesthetics and beauty as a reason for getting them done. There were also people who said that they chose to get their tattoos in less visible areas because they don't want to draw attention to themselves with them and that often they manage to create a state of mystery for strangers at the time when he finds out about them.

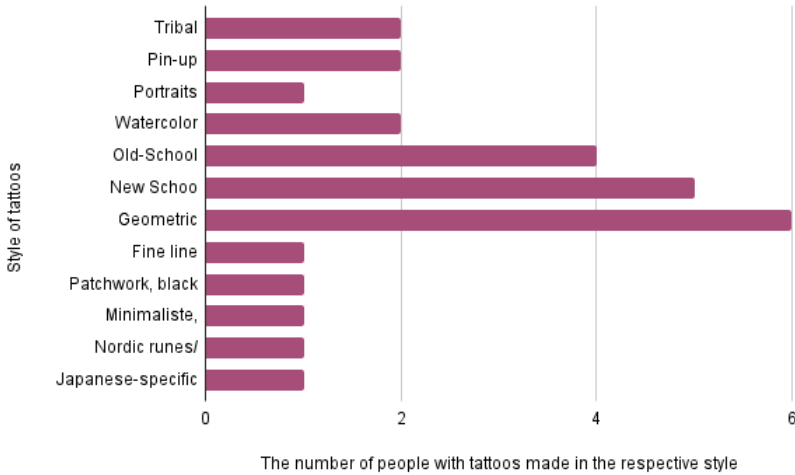
Regarding the retired people, they also brought a slightly older perspective, namely the one from the time of communism in Romania when tattoos were the most common in the army. They mentioned that they got their tattoos during the time they spent in the army, their tattoos being done on their arms by their colleagues who made them with needles and ink. These were typical sailors' tattoos represented by hearts pierced by arrows or mermaids. One of them also said that it was more

of a spur of the moment and motivated by the social group of that time. They also said that in the case of their jobs as construction workers and carpenters, they did not encounter serious reactions to their tattoos, especially because they were small and could be covered, but one of them pointed out that at that time the people who got tattoos in the army or in adolescence, they were not allowed regardless of their performance and qualification to enter a police or military school.



**Figure 5.** The preferences of tattoo consumers according to the location area on the body  
**Source:** Authors' work

On the other hand, when the same people were asked about the tattoo style in which their own tattoos are found, among the tattooed people interviewed, 6 people said that their tattoos have a geometric style, 5 have new school, 4 have old school. Also, 2 people said that they have tattoos made in the watercolor, tribal and pin-up style and there were people who said that they have tattoos made in the following styles: Patchwork, black out, the style that has become popular since 2020, fairy, Minimalist, colorful, fine lines, Nordic and Japanese inspiration. (See Figure 6)



**Figure 6.** The preferences of tattoo consumers according to the existing tattoo styles

**Source:** Authors' work

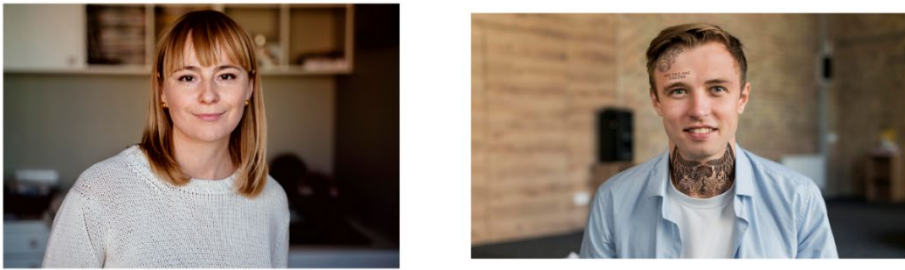
In a similar vein, when people were asked at what age it is advisable for a person to get a tattoo, most of them mentioned that at least from 18 years old, when you get to have some accumulated maturity and a certain life experience as well as the capacity for self-analysis and knowledge of self. The main reasons for this statement were on the premise that when you are a teenager it is possible to later regret the tattoos done if you do not think about them well before doing them. They commonly noted that the primary motivation for getting tattoos is typically driven by a desire for artistic freedom and beauty rather than by a negative issue. To the question asked: "How much time did you give to the tattoo decision or the choice of the model to be tattooed?", many of them claimed that they didn't take much time to select or consider the model, only a short time before the scheduled appointment at the tattoo parlor or even just a few minutes before deciding on the tattoo artist's recommendation on the model. Also, in response to the questions, "How did you choose the model for the tattoo?" One person replied that he simply selected a model he liked from the internet, another said that he asked a friend who is artistic to create the model in accordance with his instructions, and another said that he simply wanted to have a scene from his favorite anime

tattooed on his arm. Some interviewees also said that the chosen tattoo model represents a special memory or a particular memorable experience for them, which is also related to thoughts about the meaning of getting tattoos or of having tattoos. Most people, especially students, who were asked about their tattooing preferences said that they went to tattoo artists who were highly recommended by friends or by advertisements on social media.

Regarding the interviewed tattoo artists, they brought into view in some respects the disappointment with Romanian clients in terms of education on this subject and the lack of interest in the tattooing process itself. They also mentioned that the vast majority do not value the work and the process of making tattoos and they just want to have one, not paying attention to hygiene, complexity, and the accreditations of a tattoo artist. *“Many choose to get tattooed by someone at home who does not have a course in the field just because tattoos are cheaper in the end”* were some of the arguments brought by them. Moreover, they said that they have had many clients who do not appreciate the work behind the creation of the model and that they give up appointments even on the day in question, especially when they find out the amount for them. And this often represents a minus in the continuation of the business and a waste of time, especially for tattooists at the beginning of the journey. On the other hand, another opinion attested to the satisfaction of the existing of social media in the process of promoting the business and that thanks to the advertisements on their own social media accounts, they managed to attract a wider range of customers, especially young ones. All of them mentioned that they are surprised from the point of view of the diversity of the of people who cross their threshold at the tattoo studio, and how much the openness towards these ways of body decoration has increased in recent years.

The use of eye-tracking technology, as in the second method of gathering primary data, will be discussed next in this paragraph. That's being said, eye tracking is an innovative research tool that enables researchers to study participants' eyes movement while they engage in certain activities or tasks. This provides insight into the cognitive processes underpinning a variety of human behaviors, and it might also aid in the development of models or strategies that organizations can use to better understand and interact with a specific demographic of customers (Mitu & Bota, 2021).

The research tool was made available for free by the Gaze Recorder platform, which allowed for the development and execution of a test that allowed for the analysis of the interactions between a person's movements, fixation, and the stimulus that was chosen to be viewed for 15 seconds, during this online platform for scientific research. Two photographs from the Free Pick platform were selected for this eye-tracking study with a male and female subject to ensure gender balance. Both individuals have a "clean" appearance, but only one had ink on his neck and face. Figures 7 below show the photos that were utilized during the test as study materials.



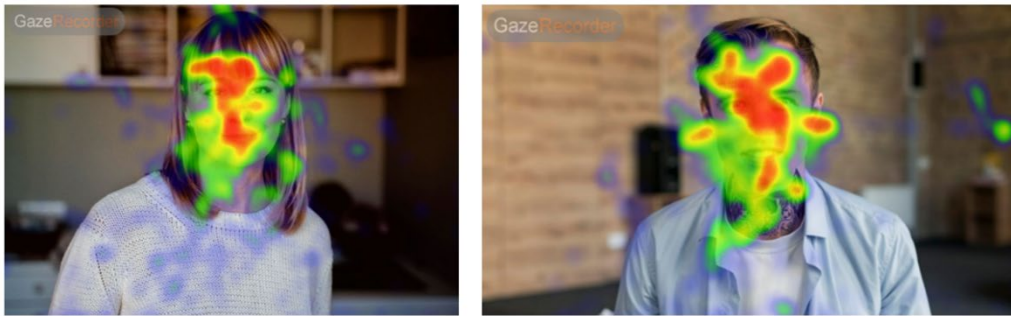
**Figure 7.** Stimulus: Photo of a tattooed candidate chosen for the eye-tracking test  
**Source:** Picture obtained from Freepick platform <https://www.freepik.com/> and edited by the author in terms of tattoo application

The characters in both images have been placed in the middle, have certain compositional elements, and even share colors in terms of accessories and attire. They were selected in this manner in order to see if, generally speaking, people view and form an initial opinion of others in a manner similar to that of when viewing a painting for the first time. According to the authors (Mitu & Bota, 2021), when viewing a stimulus, people tend to focus their attention primarily on the face and eyes, which are also the center of the stimulus. More than this, 7 individuals who had no prior tattooing experience also took part in the experiment. It was necessary to contact each participant separately through social media and telephone to introduce them to the study's theme and purpose, as well as what the eye-tracking technology entails and how it will be used in this research work. This was done, regarding the subjects who participated



separately in this test that was conducted solely online, on the platform mentioned above in the text. A Heatmap and A.O.I are used to display the test findings. The Heatmap shows how the stimulus is translated into a visual with colorful overlays in both dark and light tones. Yellow and red are used to denote locations where people concentrate most intensely, whereas blue and green are used to denote areas where people concentrate less intensely.

Yellow and red denote higher levels of interaction, whereas blue denotes lower levels of attentiveness. The A.O.I., which locates specific locations where stimuli are situated and calculates pertinent values from those places, is the second sort of outcome. These metrics include the number of persons who looked at the area, how long they looked at the stimulus, how often they looked at it, and how often they moved back and forth inside that area. The Heatmap is shown in the Figure 8 bellow.



**Figure 8.** Heatmap corresponding to the image of a tattooed and nontattooed person used as a stimulus.

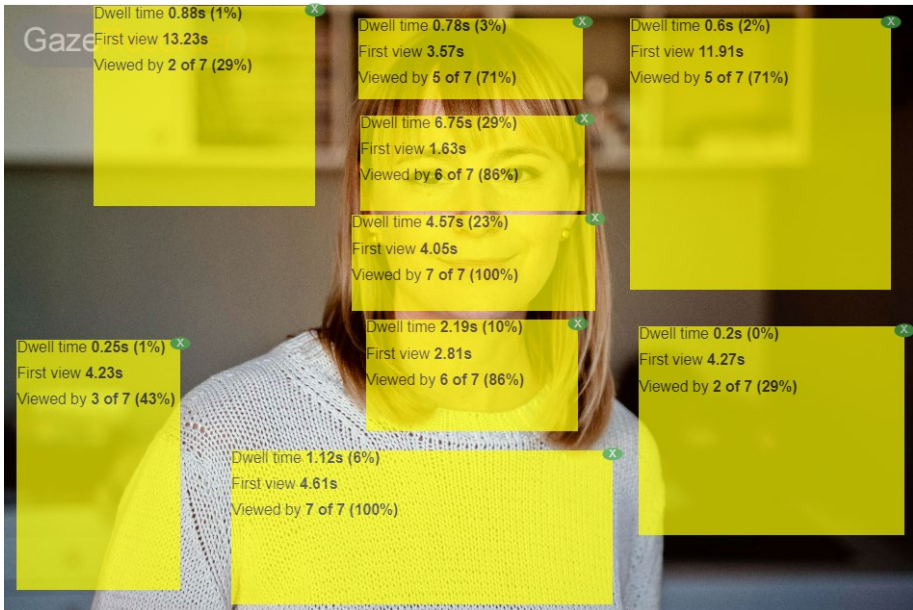
**Source:** Gaze Recorder Platform: <https://app.gazerecorder.com/Study/>

It is clear from the composition of the image of the tattooed man that the test subjects were drawn to and appeared most interested in the center of the image, which represented the subject of the picture. The picture of the women without tattoos experienced the same thing. The person's mouth, nose, and neck area are more prominently highlighted by the color red. The face, the tattoos on the subject, and the blurred decoration in the background of the image were the next elements that managed to draw the attention of all the participants more effectively and more. This hierarchy of colors was also present in the heatmap of the

tattooed man. Regarding the areas of interest, which are the second category of results provided by the platform (See Figure 9), it appears that 6 out of 7 users spent a total of 3.34 seconds looking at the neck region of the person in the image during their first view. With a total look time of 3.45 seconds and a time recorded for the first gaze fixation of 3.72 seconds, the eye area appears to be the first part of the image that individuals spent the most time gazing at. This area is the second most observed area in the image. Because people’s attention, regardless of its direction, tends to return to a region throughout the time allotted for a look, it appears that two participants spent 14.19 seconds in the background area that is blurred on the right side of the image. This is also conceivable since people are curious about making sense of the components in the hazy backdrop, as one participant explicitly acknowledged. For a total of 3.83 seconds, with a first gaze fixation of 1.1 seconds, only 3 of the 7 participants focused on the second tattooed area in this image, which is the one on the left side of the forehead. People looked at the mouth and chin portions of the woman’s photo for a longer period of time than they did the man’s (See Figure 10), with the total attention time in each area being 2.19 seconds and the first gaze fixation in each location being 2.81 seconds. Six of the seven people were focusing on the neck region.



**Figure 9.** A.O.I. results corresponding to the tattooed man’s image  
**Source:** <https://app.gazerecorder.com/Study/>



**Figure 10.** A.O.I. corresponding to the nontattooed women's image  
**Source:** <https://app.gazerecorder.com/Study/v>

The participants in the trial also seemed to be paying attention to the subject's mouth and attire. The average amount of time spent looking at the mouth area was 4.57 seconds, with the first look taking an average of 4.05 seconds, compared to other facial features like the eyes. The average amount of time spent looking at clothing by the participants was 1.12 seconds, and the average duration of the initial stare was 4.61 seconds. This shows that people's gazes are no longer fixed on that region, with the importance of a person's look taking precedence. Similar results for the tattooed person's image support the hypothesis that people pay attention to the face and neck in addition to the stimulus's center region.

Additionally, several people stated that they frequently stared into someone's eyes because, in general, that is the first thing that draws their attention to a person's people when they were asked where they looked more and why at the conclusion. Another individual said that he spent a lot of time studying the tattoo on his neck to determine exactly what was in the model and what it stood for. Another individual commented that he was also interested in the backdrop details because they were obscured, and they

wanted to identify them. Another viewpoint expressed by the experiment's participants was that the tattooed man "seems a little creepy," particularly in light of the size of his eyes and his smile. The tattoos weren't even a factor because these were the most notable and descriptive aspects of the man's description.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, perceptions about tattoos in the workplace are evolving as young individuals increasingly accept and value them to display their uniqueness and personal style. Even if tattoos are usually not given much attention in Romania or other countries, there is still a generational divide and some stigma associated with them, especially among older individuals and those in specialized fields like aviation and hospitality. The fact that some people with tattoos are still hired despite these preconceptions should be stressed.

Through tattoos, which are becoming more and more recognized as a popular form of artistic and personal expression, people are able to express their feelings, experiences, and identities. The design of the tattoo, rather than just its outward appearance, is said to have a greater impact on one's career options. Size, complexity, aesthetics, and placement intent are all taken into consideration while placing a tattoo. Although there are differing views on how tattoos affect a person's career, in general it is believed that they offer a bold, authentic, and hip method to express oneself.

Another conclusion is that tattoos were once regularly associated with crime or perceived as rebellious symbols. Although there is still some social stigma in Romania regarding tattoos, this stigma tends to diminish over time as society becomes more accepting of various kinds of self-expression. Internal organizational norms may affect career chances in the workplace depending on corporate rules and the industry they are applied in. Conservative businesses may continue to maintain a restrictive view on visible tattoos, even while some have a more open approach and value the skills and qualities of employees. More than this, it appears that the demand for permanent tattoos has greatly increased recently, particularly in industrialized countries like the United States, Australia, and Europe, according to the second and third chapters of this essay. Researchers

have shown that people with tattoos who are looking for work, particularly those with tattoos on conspicuous locations, can experience difficulty. Despite this, people from all walks of life, including those involving different genders, ages, educational levels, and occupations, continue to fearlessly accept tattoo artwork on their skin. Considering the increased legal safeguards against discrimination based on appearance and the rising acceptance of tattoos in society, particularly among younger individuals entering the profession, it is imperative to examine prejudices against job applicants with noticeable tattoos. Despite having qualifications that are on par with or even superior to those of those without tattoos, hiring managers may instinctively reject this expanding category of candidates due to stereotypes and biases regarding those with visible tattoos.

It is critical to acknowledge and address the challenges that job applicants with prominent tattoos experience if the workplace is to be inclusive and varied. Another finding from the eye-tracking study in the previous chapter is the potential for advancing and demonstrating the concept of social behavior in terms of how the public perceives individuals with various physical characteristics, and that paying close attention to someone's appearance is not always indicative of a negative perception but rather is simply a general activity of focusing on compositional elements with alluring colors and features. The main factors in people's attention fixations are things like tattoos as well as more generic things like a person's face and attire that catch their sight. Because tattoos are physical alterations to a person's body that only slightly alter the perception of their clean skin, they are nothing more than an attention-grabbing visual stimulus. This attention, however, may later result in misunderstandings about a person's mentality if their tattoos convey offensive, diabolical, or macabre meanings that could inspire bad deeds. It's important to remember that some organizations and professions continue to hold conservative views on visible tattoos, which might restrict a person's chances for employment. It's crucial to challenge stereotypes and embrace diversity, including different forms of self-expression like tattoos, in order to foster a more welcoming and inclusive workplace in both professional and personal contexts.

## RECOMMENDATION

The holding of more events and exhibitions devoted to this form of expression in Romania is one suggestion for how to advance the generalization of tattooing activity and the normality of tattooed persons in social contexts. In order to help promote tattoos in Romania and the actors involved in this activity as well as the protection and hygiene measures as well as the warnings regarding when to choose to get a tattoo, it is also necessary to promote the presence of tattoos in recruitment campaigns for jobs. Furthermore, managers can utilize online eye-tracking techniques to analyze prospects more objectively when they get CVs or test their new junior recruiters' skills. They will be better able to resist being ruled by irrational beliefs thanks to this. People may be able to increase their chances of landing a job by choosing fewer radical tattoos that are less likely to be stigmatized and applying body art to less visible places of the body, like on the face.

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